

Message Text

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ACTION ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ERDA-05 AF-06 ARA-06 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2578

INFO USMISSION IAEA VIENNA

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

S E C R E T TEHRAN 6939

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PARM

SUBJECT: MULTINATIONAL NUCLEAR CENTERS: ASSESSMENT OF
IRANIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD PLUTONIUM REPROCESSING

REF: STATE 154049

1. SUMMARY. IRAN HAS SOME ADVANTAGES AS A POSSIBLE SITE
FOR A MULTI-NATIONAL NUCLEAR CENTER FOR THE MIDDLE EAST,
BUT THE GOI WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY PREFER TO HAVE UNDILUTED
CONTROL OVER ITS OWN PLUTONIUM REPROCESSING PLANT.

END SUMMARY.

2. OVER ONE YEAR AGO THE GOI EMBARKED ON A VERY AMBITIOUS
PROGRAM OF DEVELOPEMENT OF NUCLEAR POWER FOR PEACEFUL PUR-
POSES. THE AIM IS TO SHIFT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE FROM

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OIL TO THE ATOM AS A SOURCE OF ELECTRICITY IN ORDER TO

PRESERVE IRAN'S DWINDLING POOLS OF PETROLEUM FOR INDUSTRIAL USE. NO GOI OFFICIAL HAS SATISFACTORILY EXPLAINED HOW IRAN EXPECTS TO ABSORB 23,000 MWE OF ADDITIONAL POWER WITHIN THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THE SHAH TAKES A LIVELY PERSONAL INTEREST IN EACH STEP OF THE PROGRAM IS A FAIR INDICATION OF NUCLEAR POWER'S HIGH STANDING AMONG THE NATION'S PRIORITIES.

3. THE COMPONENTS OF THE GOI'S MOTIVATION TO ACQUIRE THIS COMPLEX AND EXPENSIVE TECHNOLOGY ARE NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR. IN ADDITION TO THE RESOURCE INCENTIVE AND THE PROMISE OF CHEAPER POWER, IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE SHAH REGARDS NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS AS SYMBOLS OF ARRIVAL AMONG THE INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS OF THE WORLD. ALSO, WE CANNOT, OF COURSE, COMPLETELY RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT, IN THE EVENT OF FURTHER NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION IN THIS REGION, IRAN MIGHT FEEL THAT IT TOO MUST ACQUIRE NUCLEAR WEAPONS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IRAN'S INTEREST IN ACQUIRING NUCLEAR KNOWHOW AND PLUTONIUM IS, IN PART, MOTIVATED BY THE DESIRE TO PRESERVE THE OPTION OF DEVELOPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS SHOULD THE REGION'S POWER BALANCE SHIFT TOWARD THE NUCLEAR. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, IN THIS CONNECTION, THAT IRAN IS AN NPT SIGNATORY, ADHERES TO THE IAEA, AND HAS SPONSORED A NUCLEAR FREE ZONE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

4. SPECULATION ASIDE, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT OF THE GOI'S STRONG INTEREST IN ACQUIRING CAPABILITY IN THE ENTIRE LIGHT WATER REACTOR FUEL CYCLE. THIS HAS BEEN AFFIRMED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS BY IRANIANS IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY, AND THE ATOMIC ENERGY ORGANIZATION OF IRAN(AEOI) HAS BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN ATTEMPTING TO SECURE ASSURED SOURCES OF URANIUM ORE, ENRICHMENT SERVICES, AND THE LIKE. THEY ARE EQUALLY INTERESTED IN HAVING THE OPTION, WHEN THEY PERCEIVE THE NEED, TO POSSESS THEIR OWN FUEL REPROCESSING FACILITY. THIS DESIRE IS SO STRONG, IN FACT, THAT OUR INSISTENCE THAT U.S.-SUPPLIED ENRICHED URANIUM, IF REPROCESSED WITHIN IRAN, ONLY BE REPROCESSED IN A MULTINATIONAL PLANT APPEARS TO BE THE MAIN REMAINING HURDLE TO SIGNATURE OF THE U.S.-IRAN BILATERAL AGREEMENT ON PEACEFUL USES OF ATOMIC ENERGY, SOME IRANIANS APPEAR TO THINK THAT

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A JOINTLY MANAGED AND OPERATED PLANT WOULD BE UNWORKABLE, BUT LURKING UNSPOKEN IN THE BACKGROUND MAY BE AN UNWILLINGNESS TO SUBMIT THEIR PLANT TO FOREIGN SURVEILLANCE. IT IS EVEN MORE DOUBTFUL THAT THE GOI WOULD BE SATISFIED WITH ACCWSS TO AMULTINATIONAL REPROCESSING PLANT LOCATED OUTSIDE THEIR TERRITORY. THEY SAY THEY ARE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN ACCESS TO THE TECHNOLOGY INVOLVED IN THE ENTIRE FUEL CYCLE, AND SUCH ANS ARRANGEMENT WOULD NOT

ACHIEVE THAT GOAL.

5. CONCERNING THE SUITABILITY OF IRAN ITSELF AS THE SITE FOR A MULTINATIONAL NUCLEAR CENTER, CONDITIONS ON THE WHOLE WOULD APPEAR TO FAVORABLE. IRAN HAS NO DEARTH OF REMOTE AREAS FOR LONG-TERM STORAGE OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE, AND THE PUBLIC IS INSUFFICIENTLY EDUCATED IN THE DANGERS OF RADIOACTIVITY TO RISE AGAINST THE IDEA. IRAN IS POLITICALLY STABLE--AS LONG AS THE SHAH SURVIVES--AND THE GOVERNMENT COULD CERTAINLY PROVIDE FOR THE PHYSICAL SECURITY OF A NUCLEAR CENTER. BECAUSE OF CENTO AND RCD TIES, TURKEY AND PAKISTAN COULD BE EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN AN IRANIAN CENTER, IF THEY COULD NOT HAVE A REPROCESSING PLANT OF THEIR OWN, BUT THE ARAB COUNTRIES WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE RELUCTANT TO DO SO. A DISADVANTAGE FOR IRAN AS THE SITE FOR A MULTINATIONAL NUCLEAR CENTER IS THE INADEQUACY OF ITS INDUSTRIAL BASE. ALTHOUGH GROWING, IRANIAN INDUSTRY IS STILL SEVERELY LIMITED IN SCOPE AND SHORT OF MATERIALS, TRAINED LABOR, AND MANAGEMENT.

6 .THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS PURELY A GOVERNMENTAL ONE. IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO NOTE THE FOLLOWING. UNTIL APRIL OF 1974, ALL PLANNING FOR NUCLEAR POWER CENTERED IN THE THEN MINISTRY OF WATER AND POWER. WHEN THE AEOI WAS FORMED, THE SUCCESSOR MINISTRY OF ENERGY WAS LEFT ONLY WITH THERMAL POWER, HYDRO POWER, ADN THE NATIONAL GRID, IN ADDITION TO DEVEOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES. THE MINISTRY AND THE AEOI ARE NOT KNOWN TO CONSULT ON IRAN'S ELECTRIC POWER DEVELOPMENT,DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE LATTER WILL BE SUPPLYING LARGE INCREMENTS OF POWER TO THE FORMER FOR DISTRIBUTION TO INDUSTRY AND THE PUBLIC. PERSONAL AND/OR INSTITUTIONAL JEALOUSY APPEARS TO BE AN INGREDIENT IN THIS UNFORTUNATE SITUATION.

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